STALKE OUT OF SPACE

Lawrence Weiner and Albert Mertz

Stalke Project Space
Nørregade 7 c, Copenhagen

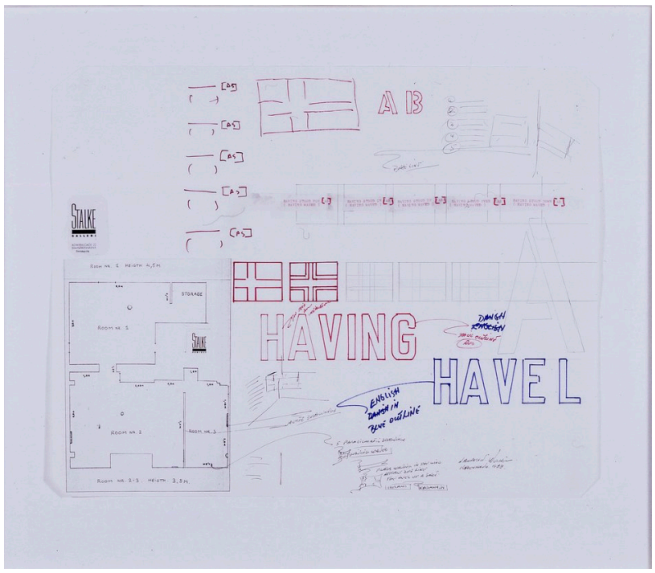
26.2 to 20.3 1988

In 1988, Lawrence Weiner and Albert Mertz were presented together at Stalke Project in Copenhagen in an exhibition that marked an important encounter between two key figures in international conceptual art.

The exhibition was noted for its uncompromising use of the gallery space and for the artists' direct engagement with the architectural framework of the rooms. The space was not treated as a neutral backdrop but as an active component, with scale, color, and spatial interventions functioning as integral elements of the works.

The presentation highlighted both Weiner's and Mertz's shared interest in language, abstraction, and the temporal nature of the exhibition, while clearly maintaining their distinct artistic positions.

The exhibition was mentioned in Kunstavisen in 1988. The article situates the collaboration within a broader art-historical context and refers to the long-standing personal and professional relationship between Weiner and Mertz.



Installation drawing by Lawrence Weiner made for Stalke Galleri in 1988, showing layout notes, floor plan and text elements related to the gallery installation.

Installation view of Albert Mertz's large wall painting at Stalke Project, featuring red and blue geometric triangles across the exhibition space.

FROM A HIGHLY PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

It's one of those clear winter mornings, often experienced when living in the countryside in Denmark.

A reddish-golden crescent moon, a bright Saturn, and Mars fade slowly between the large maple trees in the twilight. The sea is frozen, and the sky is pink, blue-green, and orange.
On the wall behind me in the cozy kitchen hangs a small pink piece of paper, a task given to us by Lawrence Weiner, which was supposed to have been completed, painted as text on one of the ceiling panels above the dining table but never got further than the wall. It was put up with thumbtacks, and the pink color is fading more and more. As often happens, it makes me think back to the years that have passed.

February '83, Aalborg. A damned cold winter. We are in the middle of preparing an exhibition at the North Jutland Art Museum. I always find myself in the role of the jack-of-all-trades—sometimes a dog in a game of skittles, but usually indispensable. Today, they've given me a "big" task: I'm to paint all the stones with red and blue paint. Lawrence wants them to look like Viking stones, and I do my best. Letting the bright red and blue paint emphasize the shape and structure of the stones. When the rounded sound sweeps over the white marble floor in front of the text on the wall, in deep pink, reading THE SALT OF THE SEA MIXED WITH THE SALT OF THE EARTH, strange shifts occur: the room fills with energy and beauty, and through the mind's work with the words and images, a different dimension arises in its totality. At the same time, it makes me reminisce about summer days on Glænø beach, where we gathered in the warm sand, lazily watching ships and birds on the sea surface.

In the museum's large exhibition hall, high up on one of the supporting constructions in cobalt blue text: RED AS WELL AS BLUE AS WELL AS YELLOW AS WELL AS, and down at the floor, Albert's tall table for giants, a cross between a painting on a plinth, a sculpture, or a utility object, cinnabar red and ultramarine.
On the hessian walls, large signals, squares, circles, crosses in red and blue, and scattered around the large room is a collection of different chairs painted red and blue for those who want to immerse themselves in this, adding their own entirely personal meaning and not just observing.

It's an exhibition—or a "show," as they call it in America—that insists on being experienced on personal terms. No definitive answers are provided, only an invitation to be present in a room and a situation. The exhibition was announced on the TV news at its opening and received a thoughtful speech by Børge Rønnow in the Aalborg Stiftstidende—otherwise poor and uncomprehending criticism from the entire Jutland press, and

The press from Copenhagen brilliantly excelled in completely neglecting it. And that was that.
However, the exhibition at the North Jutland Art Museum led to other exhibitions, as Lawrence Weiner pointed to Albert Mertz for a series of exhibitions that took place the following years in Paris, Amsterdam, and Munich.

But it all actually began back in 1973, when I first met Lawrence Weiner at my then-in-laws' home, so to speak, seated in the lap of the family.
I had just started as the head of Tranegården's Art Library in the Municipality of Gentofte, and my chance encounter in the living room with an artist who, at that time, played an important role in the international art discourse was a cultural shock that came to shape my work and my attitudes in the following years. My ignorance was legendary—but that was addressed, as Lawrence the following summer gave me a much-needed lecture, which essentially meant I had to revise all my Danish attitudes towards art and cultural life comprehensively. His strict moral demands on art and artistic activity, the responsibility toward culture; as an exhibition organizer, this was a contributing factor to many of the difficulties I inevitably had to face, fighting with public opinion and authority in a conservative municipality in a culturally self-sufficient country like Denmark.

My first meeting with Albert Mertz took place at the screening of the film "A First Quarter" in connection with Lawrence Weiner's exhibition at Tranegården in the summer of '74. We met in the library room after the screening, and the conversation Lawrence had initiated continued the same night as we toured Copenhagen's nightlife, where Albert was drowning in Danish water—and that will presumably follow us to the end of our days.
It was only in the summer of 1980 that Lawrence Weiner and Albert Mertz met each other again—once again through the family's gatherings. It was a particularly successful meeting. For me, it was not the usual experience that time had stood still for the past six years—rather, that a transformation had occurred. For Albert, it became a meeting with one of the artists whose work had had a great and decisive influence on his own thinking and work during his years in Paris.

There was immediately great sympathy between Lawrence Weiner and Albert Mertz, which is not to say that all viewpoints were aligned—but this inner congruence, where their attitudes toward the conditions for artistic work were in agreement. The uncompromising nature. And the meeting led to Weiner holding a weeklong seminar in 1982 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. Through a series of lectures, he provoked an ecstatic and optimistic atmosphere. Personally, I disagree with Lawrence in several Questions, but I completely agree that as an artist, it is necessary to be clear about what you are dealing with and under what conditions this activity unfolds. This entails that one must always "remember the little step aside." His "stepdance" captured me, and his final appeal, that the use

of art and imagination makes people the most dangerous elements in society—if they do otherwise than expected—made the Academy probably buzz with excited enthusiasm.
And the Dutch art historian Rudi Fuchs's description of Lawrence Weiner, that he is above all an art world's Che Guevara, was a fitting characterization in that situation.

On that occasion, Lawrence visited us for the first time on Glænø, and he became so interested in Albert's work that he found it entirely natural that the invitation to exhibit at the North Jutland Art Museum in '83 did not become an exhibition of separate artists but a decidedly joint work. In reality, something quite unique at the time.
In connection with the exhibition project we all participated in, in Amsterdam in '83, City Thoughts, where the artists selected artists for a series of separate exhibitions, Lawrence Weiner stated on videotape about his choice of the Danish artist Albert Mertz:
"Albert deals with every problem in contemporary art as if it were merely a metaphor for an examination of society. It is like Daniel Buren, who deals with every museum and every situation as if it were a metaphor."
At the seminar we held together at the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, it became evident that we were both concerned with the same issues but had found two different answers. He had found an answer that uses art as a metaphor, and I had found an answer that deals solely with materials.
Albert is very different from me and comes from a culture where I truly believe in human dignity, something I myself greatly admire. Fundamentally, I believe that a large part of our relationship is about Albert constantly trying to convince me that life is worth living. And I believe that not only is it the only thing worth engaging with, but it is also worth making art.
I cannot stretch further than that. Albert Mertz is the last artist whose work represents a spirituality. It presents hope for the relationship between people and the idea of art history. What fascinates me about his work is that he will always end up in the same place as me, by representing instead of reproducing.

By the way, I never asked him why he chose red and blue.
Many of Lawrence Weiner's views have greatly influenced my own work with art, even his materialistic ones the viewpoint has been decisive when it comes to the reality of the art object. What is there must and should have visibility and presence if it is to have validity as art.

I have always found great contradiction in the fact that he so persistently declares himself a materialist. How can one declare oneself a materialist when one's work so clearly deals with the invisible, imaginary dimension created by the creative mind? A work does not need to be executed—the manifestation brought forth by thought and imagination has

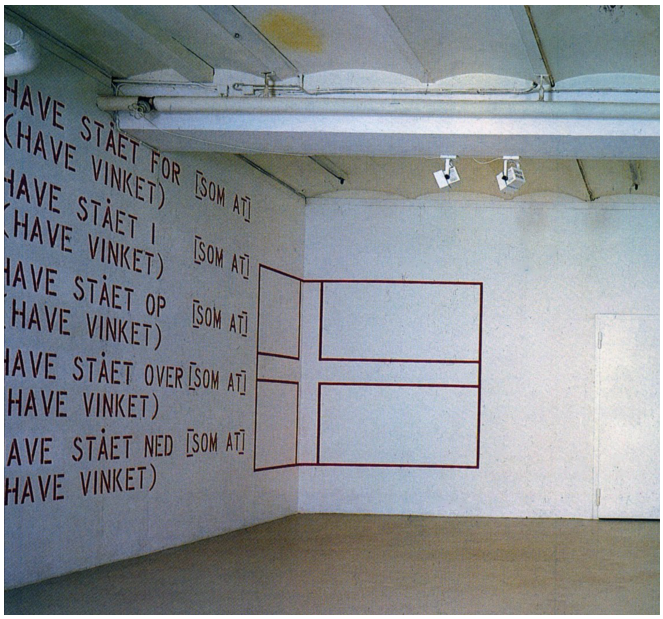
just as much validity as the material object. Or put more simply: the tree you imagine has just as strong an existence as the tree you see—a doctrine known, among others, from Tibetan Buddhism. And precisely here lies colossal potential for future artistic activity.

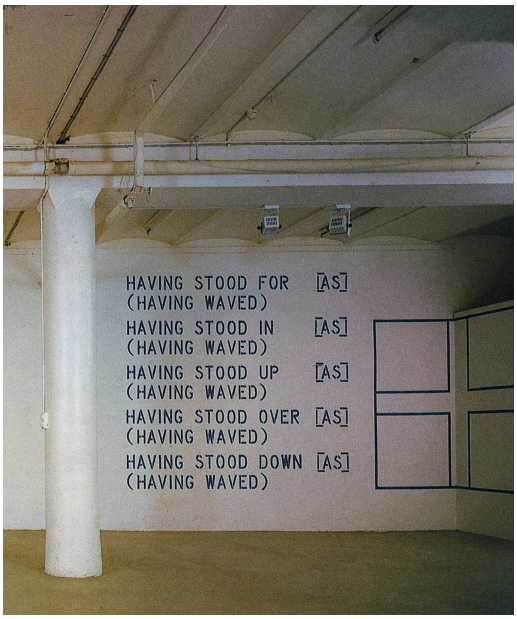
And I can completely agree with Daniel Buren, who said a couple of years ago in a conversation that there are many fine artists in our time, but not many create anything truly new. However, he regarded Lawrence Weiner as one of the artists who brought renewal to 20th-century art.
There are meetings in every life that leave marks that do not fade. Meetings that lie like finely drawn knots in a pattern, whose structure only becomes evident as time passes. My meeting with Alice and Lawrence Weiner is one of those. It was the direct cause of my meeting Albert Mertz, with whom I have lived since 1976, and of my own beginning to work with art. But where the causes actually begin is hard to see and probably impossible to trace.
In the 1960s, Lawrence fell in love in New York with the lovely red-haired girl, Alice, whose Danish family, Sørensen, came from Tversted in Northern Jutland. My child's father is a cousin to Alice, and my family also comes from the same area—in fact, they were also named Sørensen—but then again, almost everyone was back then.

In 1974, I visited the painter Albert Mertz in Skagen, where we were to arrange an exhibition at Tranegården together. And in 1983, Albert and I stood together with Lawrence at Skagen's branch, where the waters from east and west meet and clash.
We are to return to the North Jutland Art Museum and create a "Show." Time passes. On the kitchen wall, the pink piece of paper fades. An unfinished work by Lawrence Weiner:

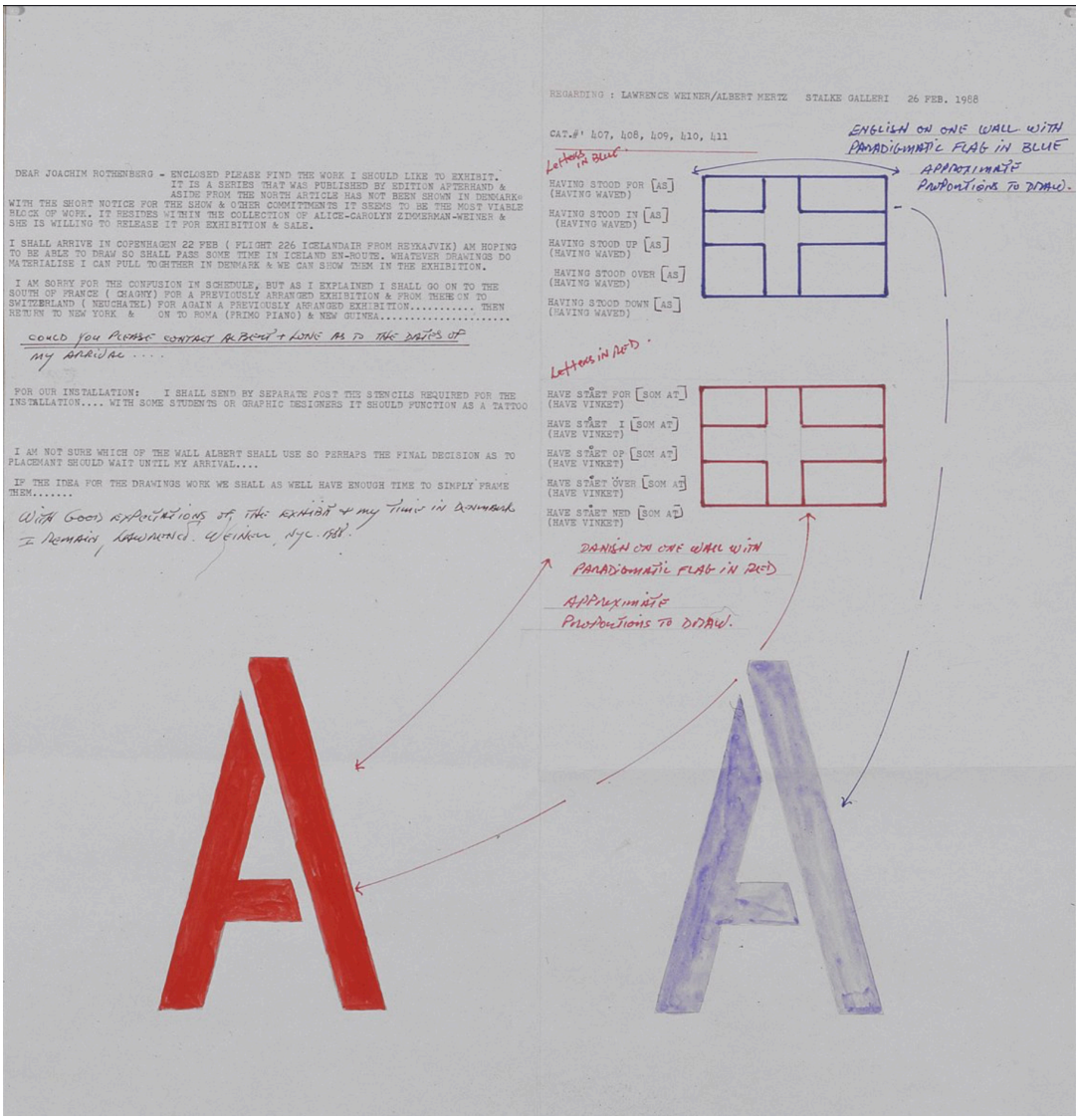
Ever widening circles
formed on the crest
of the meeting of the
waters at Skagen

Glænø, Winter 1987
Lone Mark Mertz





Installation shot, Lawrence Weiner, Stalke Project 1988



Lawrence Weiner, installations drawing